Archie
ADVENTURE SERIES
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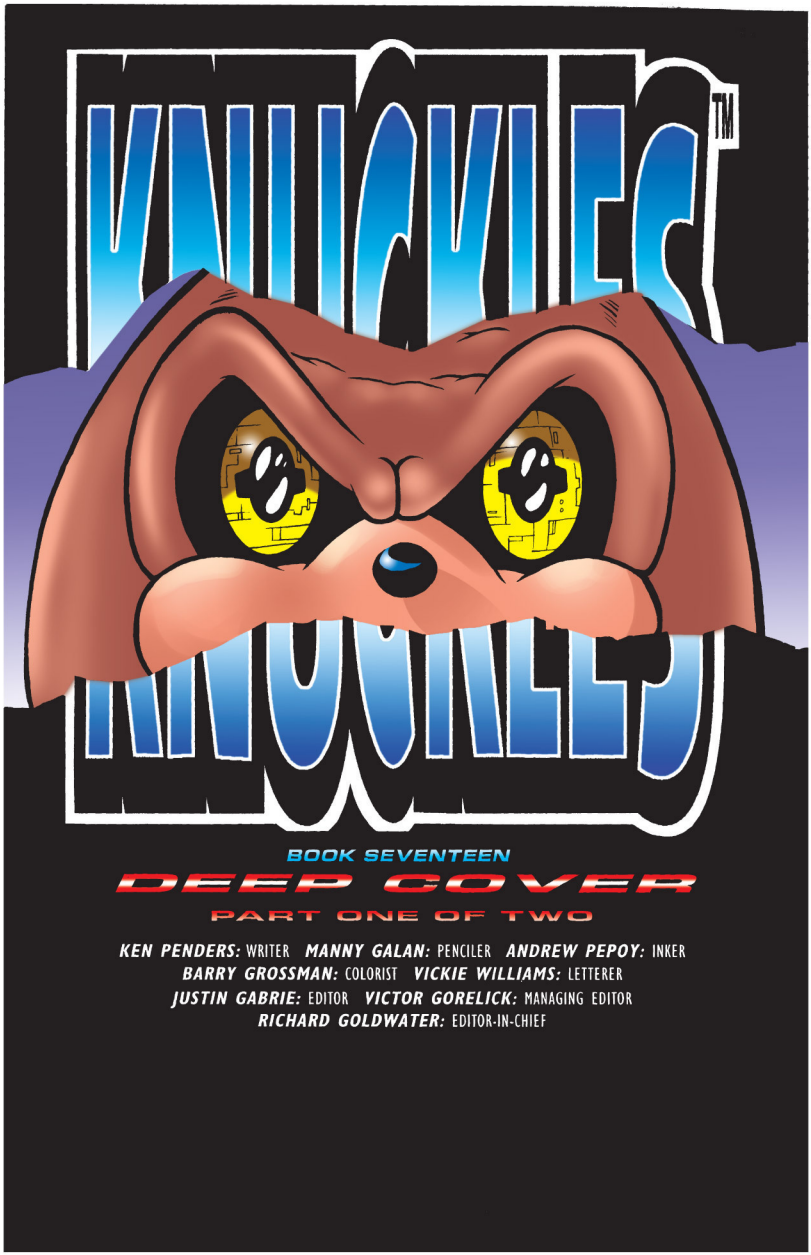
SEGA®
KNUCKLES™
THE ECHIDNA
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
PENDERS • SPAZIANTE • GALAN
GROSSMAN • WILLIAMS • PEPOY



BOOK SEVENTEEN

DEEP COVER

PART ONE OF TWO

KEN PENDERS: WRITER ***MANNY GALAN:*** PENCILER ***ANDREW PEPOY:*** INKER
BARRY GROSSMAN: COLORIST ***VICKIE WILLIAMS:*** LETTERER
JUSTIN GABRIE: EDITOR ***VICTOR GORELICK:*** MANAGING EDITOR
RICHARD GOLDWATER: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BORN TO THE MOST NOBLE OF ECHIDNA HOUSES, THE LATEST TO CONTINUE THE FAMILY HERITAGE AND RESPONSIBILITY AS GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND, DEFENDER OF ALL FROM THE FORCES OF EVIL FROM THE WORLD BEYOND AS WELL AS THOSE WHO WOULD THREATEN WITHIN, HE IS NONE OTHER THAN KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!

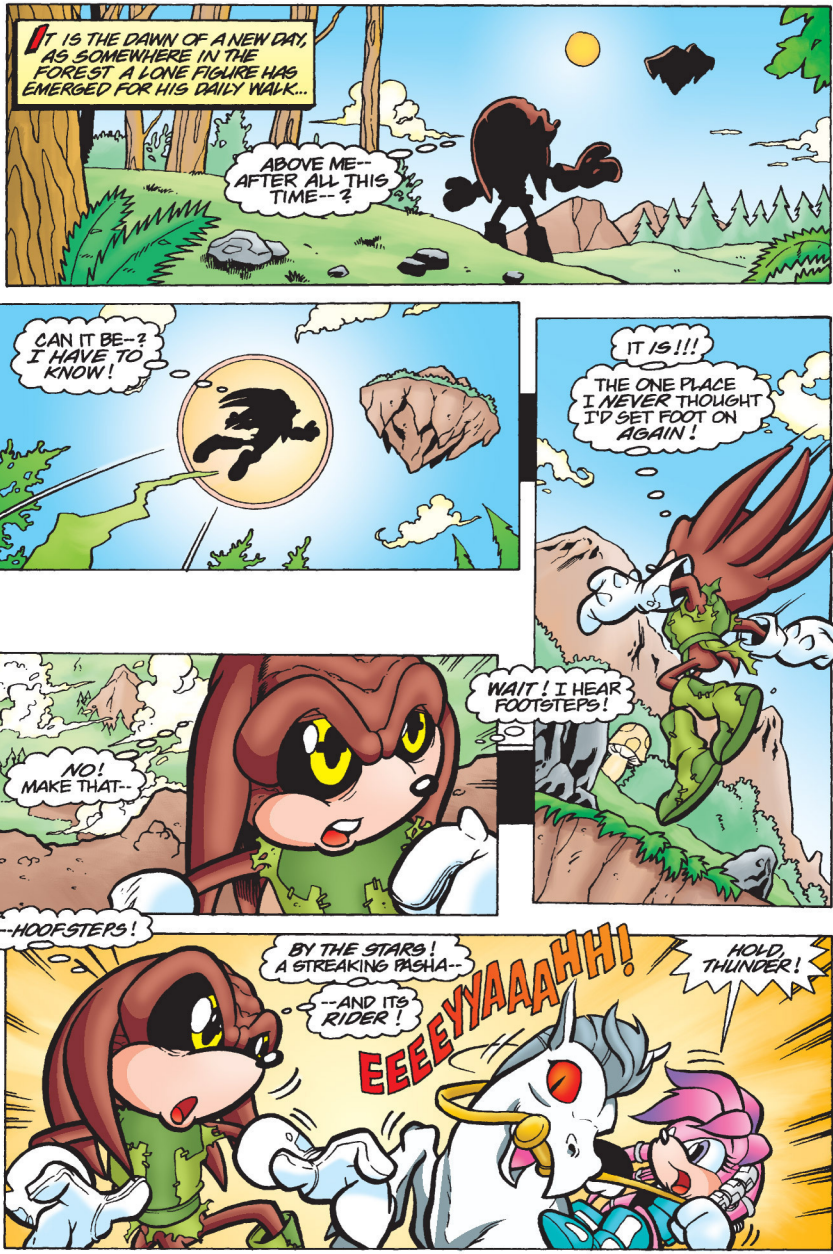
LAST ISSUE, WE LEFT KNUCKLES CONTEMPLATING MANY QUESTIONS ALONGSIDE JULIE-SU, WHO HAD MORE THAN A FEW THOUGHTS OF HER OWN. WHILE THEY MAY HAVE BEEN LOST IN THEIR OWN REFLECTIONS, THERE WERE OTHERS WHO WERE THINKING ABOUT THEM, AND WONDERING WHETHER OR NOT ANY ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN.

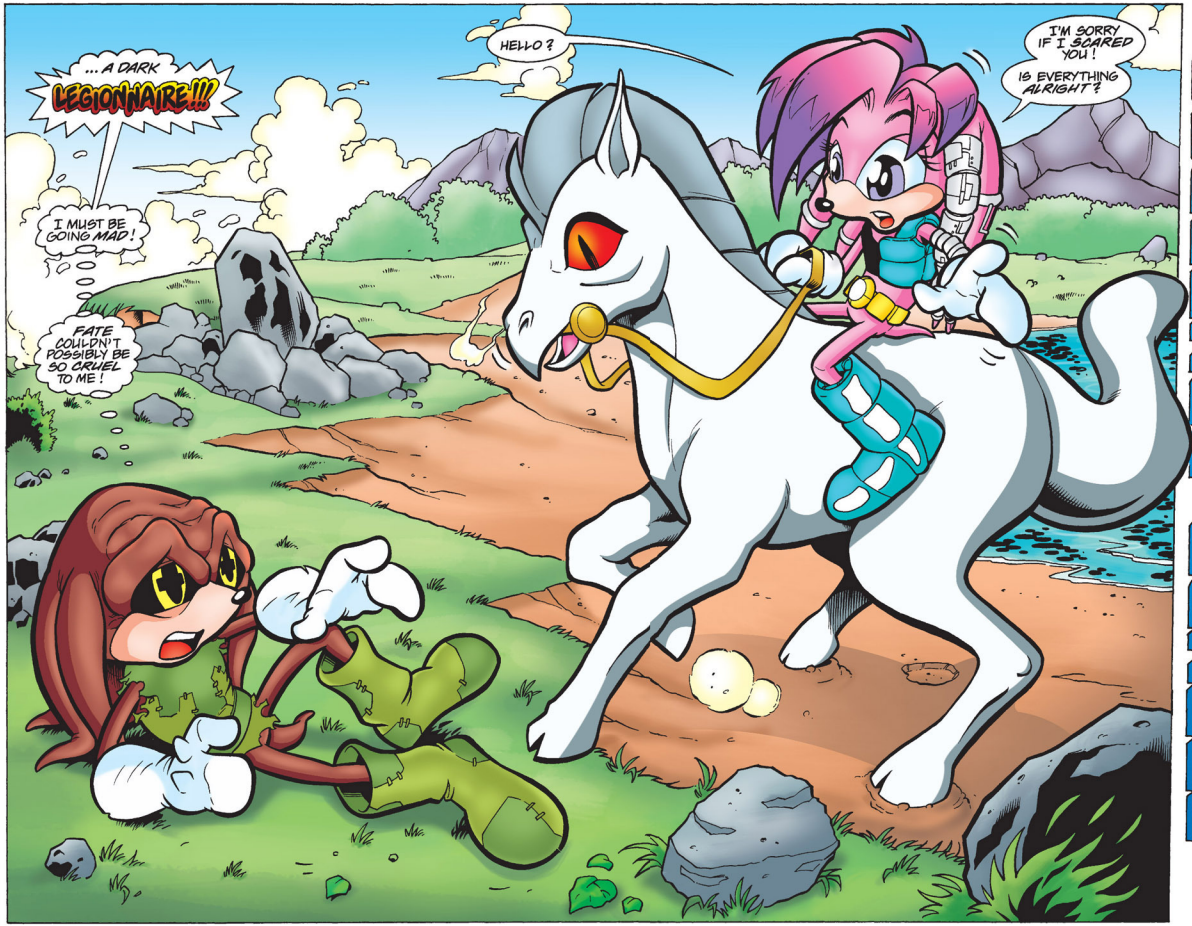
BECAUSE, YOU SEE, THESE OTHERS KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT KNUCKLES THAT NOT EVEN HE KNOWS... YET.

A SECRET SO MONUMENTAL, THAT IT COULD HAVE IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES FOR MANY... ESPECIALLY FOR KNUCKLES.

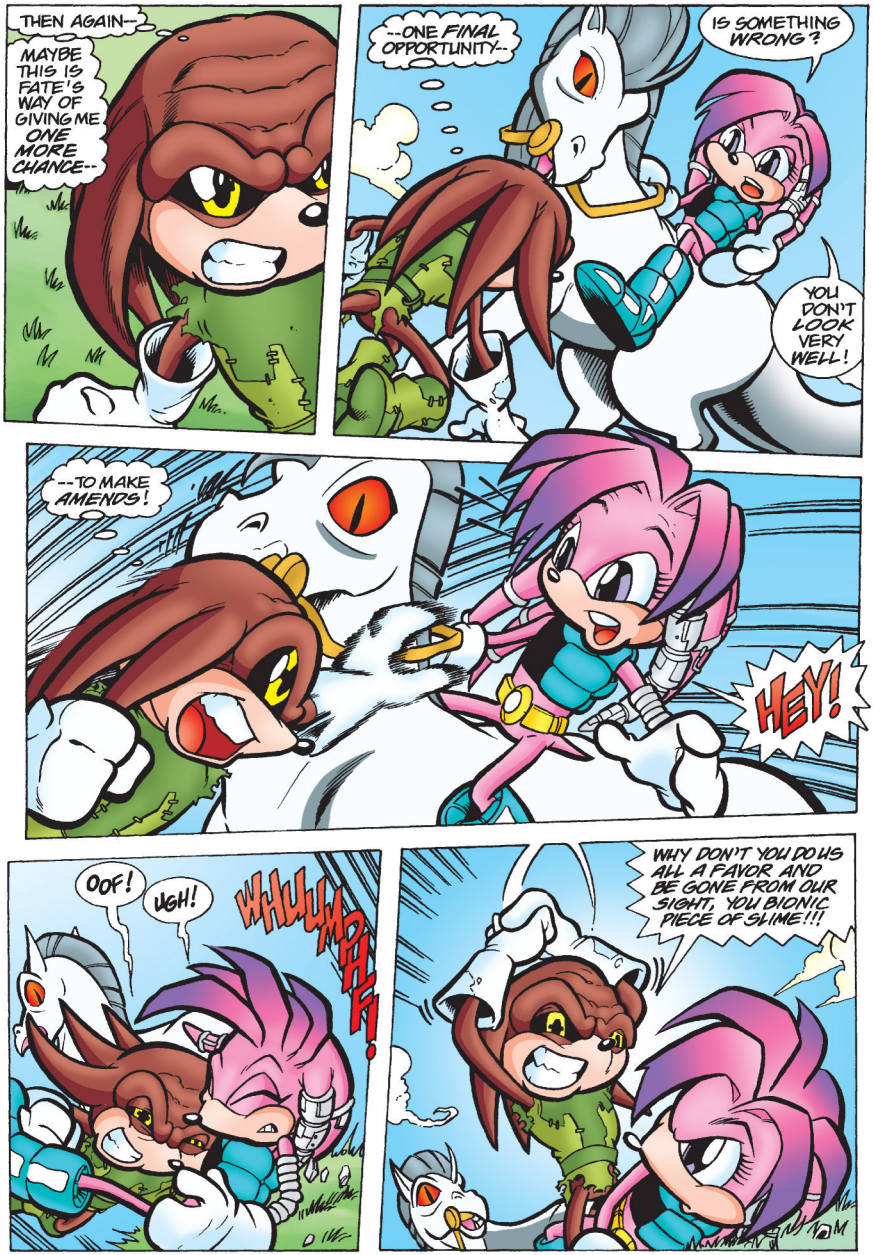
UNFORTUNATELY FOR KNUCKLES, THERE ARE MANY OTHER SECRETS ABOUT HIS FAMILY HE DOES NOT YET KNOW, WHICH NOT ONLY COULD PORTEND DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR HIM, BUT FOR ALL OF HIS FELLOW ECHIDNAS AS WELL.

IT IS ON THE SURFACE OF MOBIUS THAT ONE OF THE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THESE SECRETS MAKES ITSELF KNOWN...

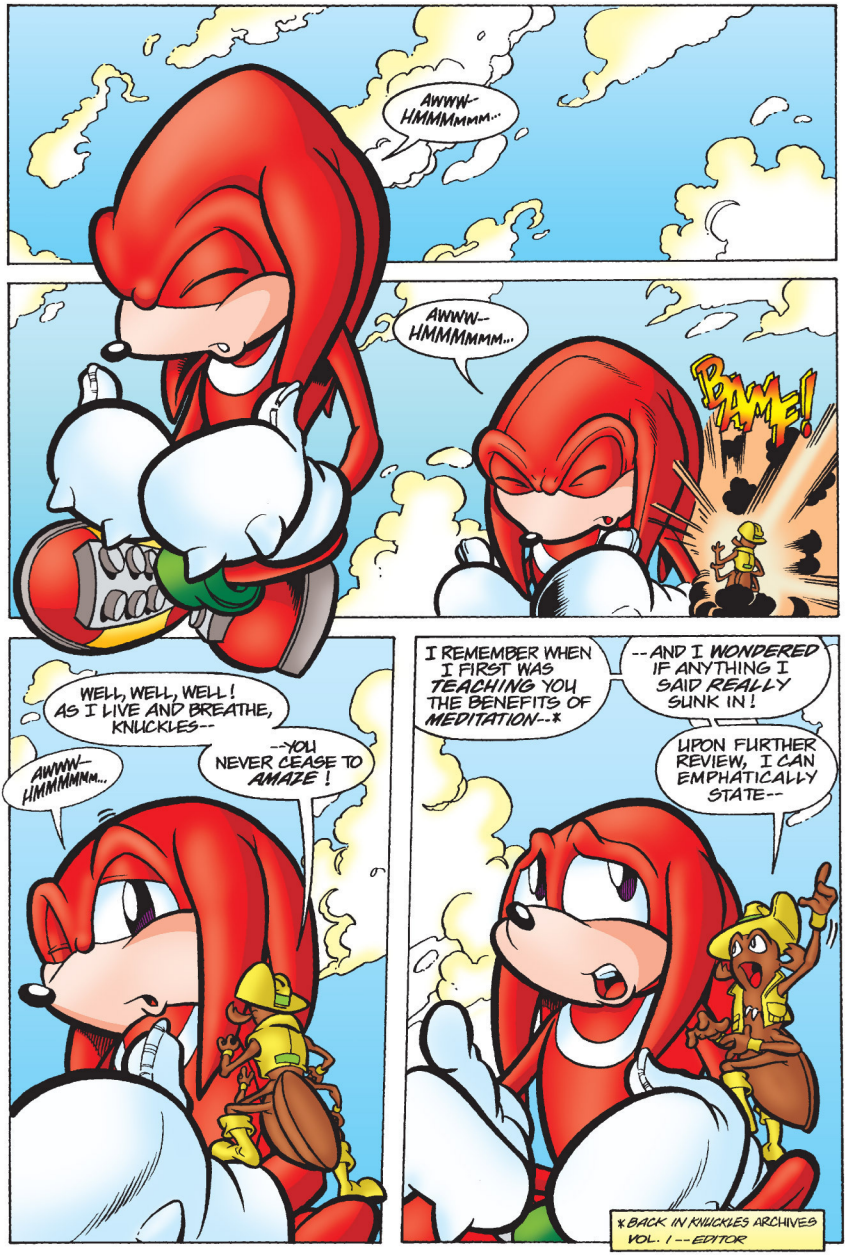

IT IS THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY, AS SOMEWHERE IN THE FOREST A LONE FIGURE HAS EMERGED FOR HIS DAILY WALK...
ABOVE ME-- AFTER ALL THIS TIME--?
CAN IT BE--? I HAVE TO KNOW!
IT IS!!!
THE ONE PLACE I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SET FOOT ON AGAIN!
WAIT! I HEAR FOOTSTEPS!
NO! MAKE THAT--
--HOOFSTEPS!
BY THE STARS! A STREAKING PASHA--
--AND ITS RIDER!
EEEEYYAAAHH!
HOLD, THUNDER!

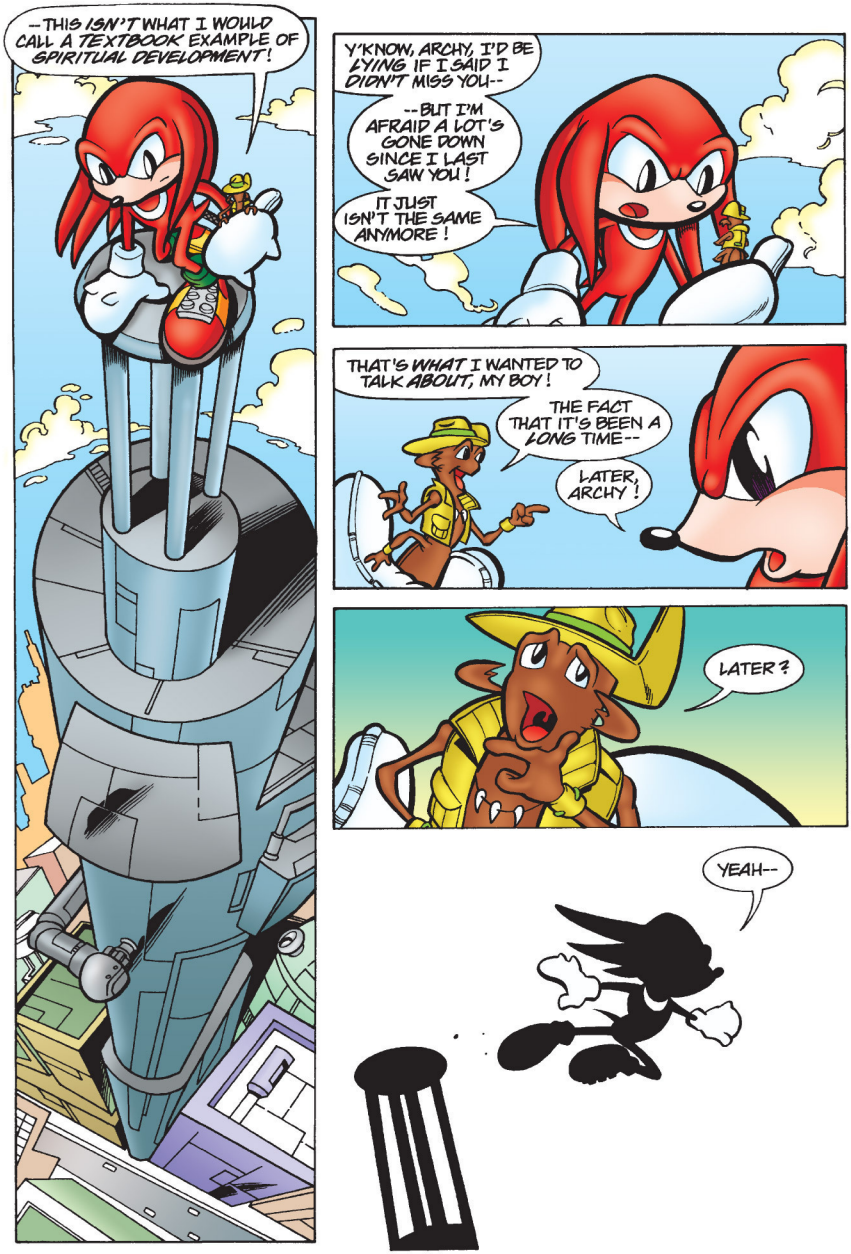

... A DARK LEGIONNAIRE!!!
I MUST BE GOING MAD!
FATE COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE SO CRUEL TO ME!
HELLO?
I'M SORRY IF I SCARED YOU!
IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?

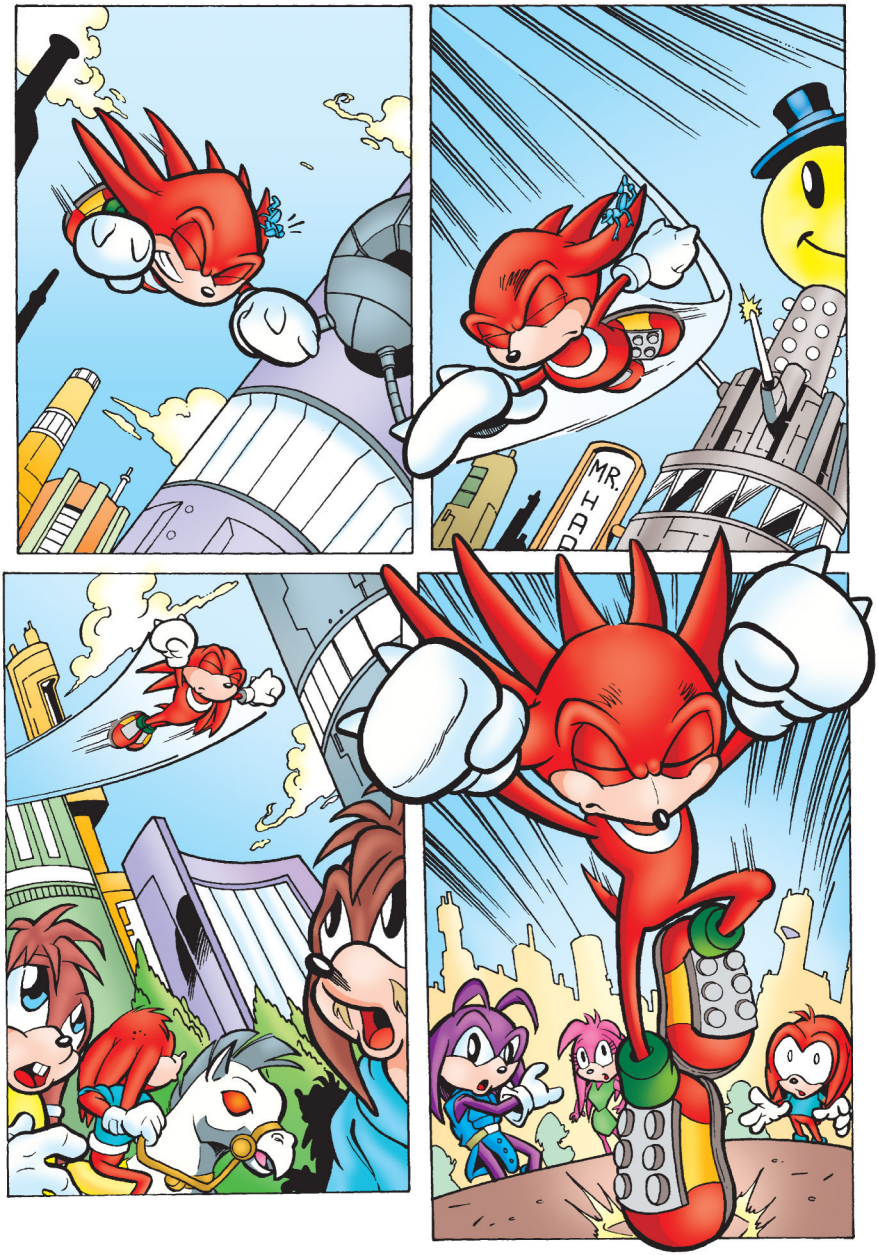
THE HEDGEHOG WHO FAILED!!!

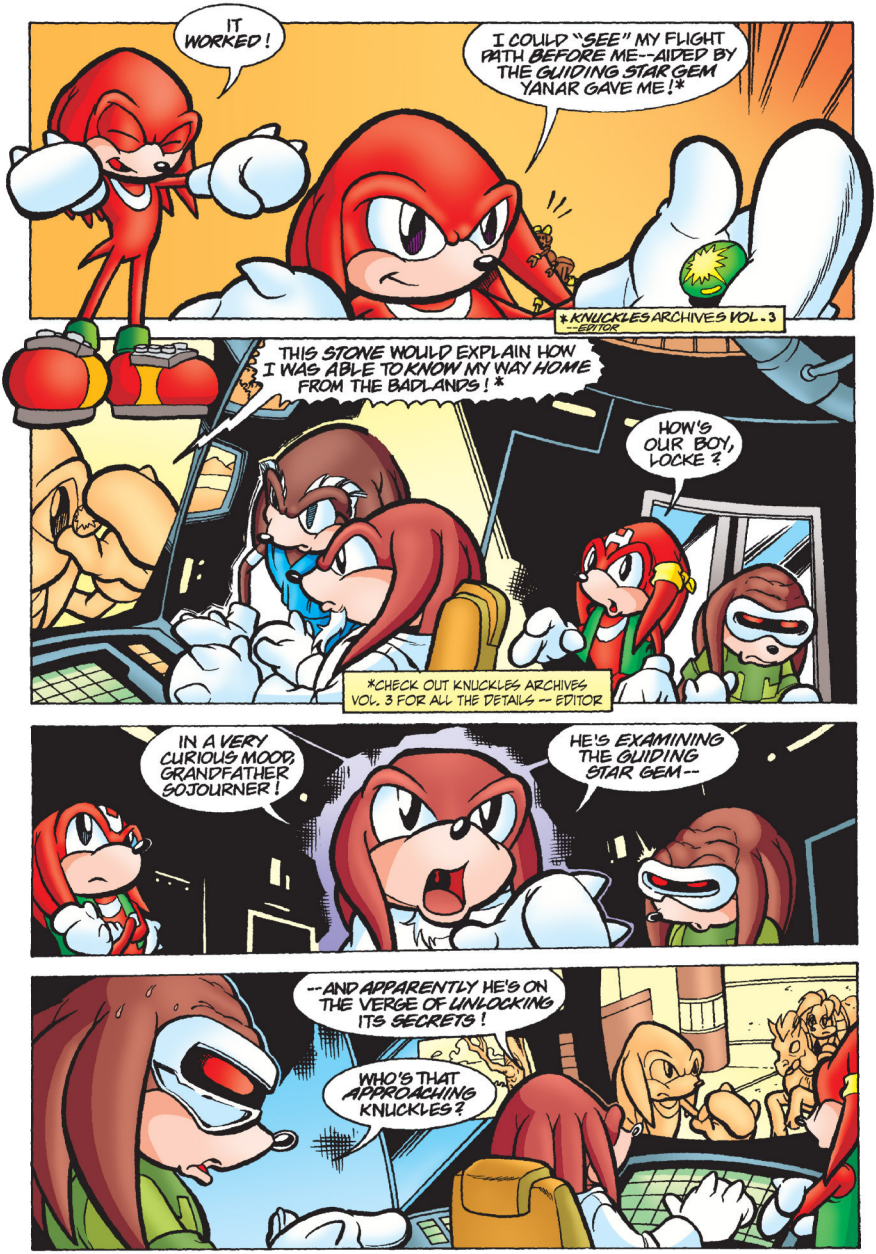

THEN AGAIN--
MAYBE THIS IS FATE'S WAY OF GIVING ME ONE MORE CHANCE--
--ONE FINAL OPPORTUNITY--
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
YOU DON'T LOOK VERY WELL!
--TO MAKE AMENDS!
HEY!
OOF!
UGH!
WHUUMPH!
WHY DON'T YOU DO US ALL A FAVOR AND BE GONE FROM OUR SIGHT, YOU BIONIC PIECE OF SLIME!!!

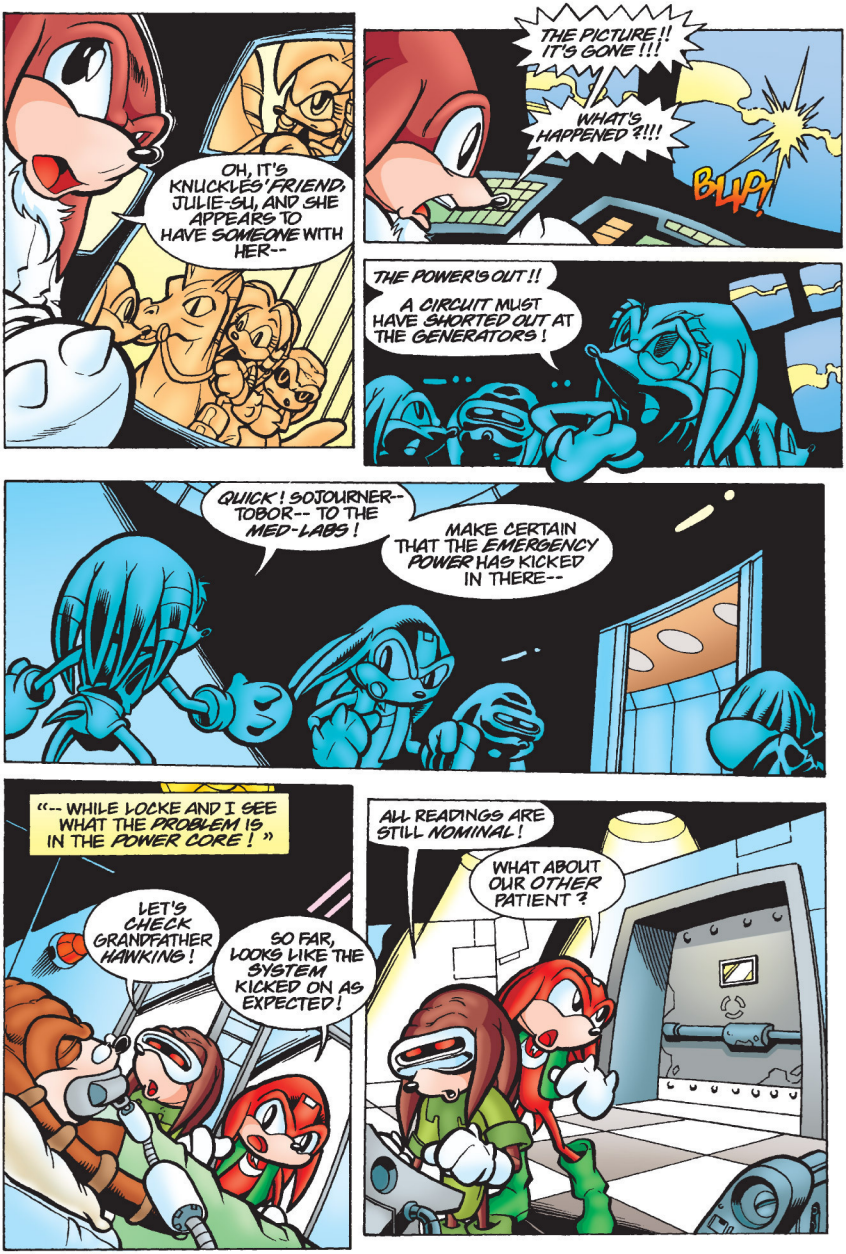
SORRY!
THAT'S NOT IN MY GAME PLAN TODAY!
NOW GET OFF OF ME!!
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO YOU!
LYING WENCH!
YOUR KIND CAN NEVER BE TRUSTED!
NOT AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO US!
NOT AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO ME!
I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY!!!
THEN--SHUT UP--AND--JUST--DO--IT--!
WELL?

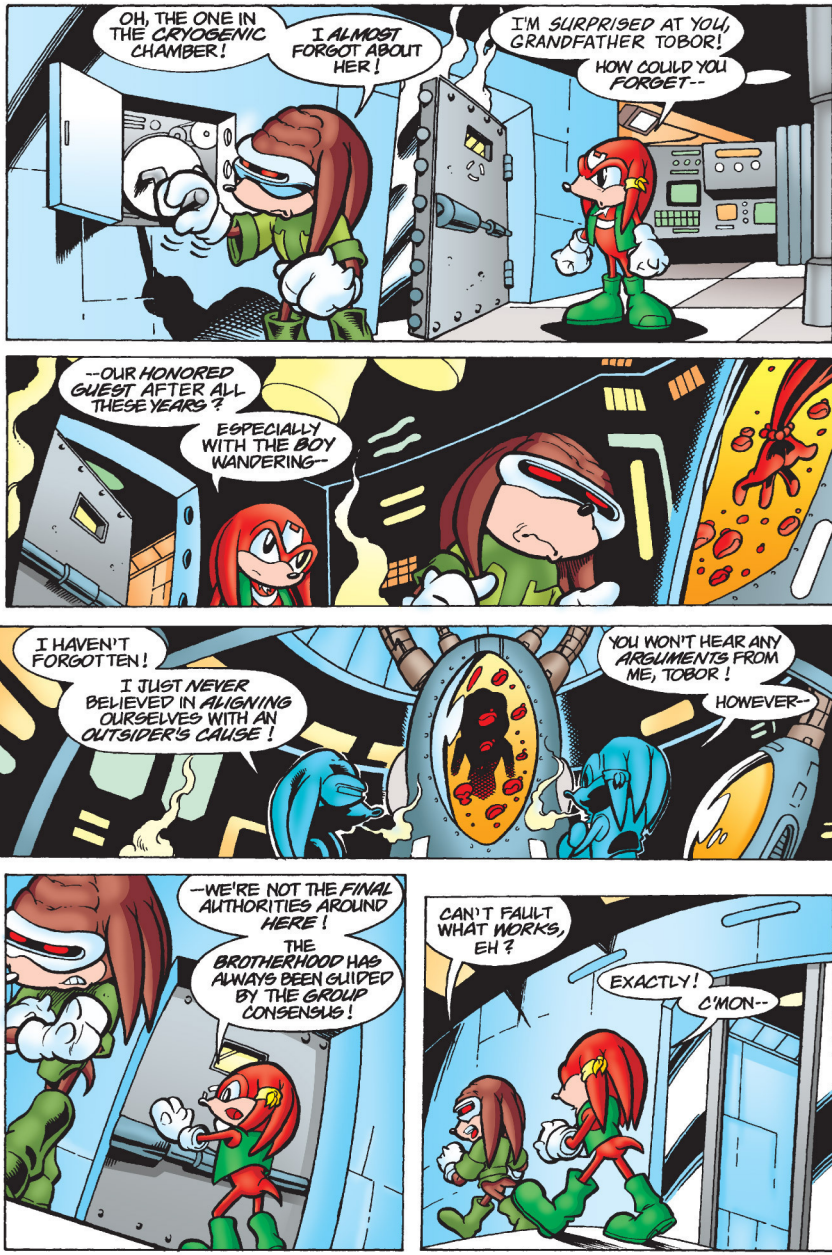

AWWW-HMMMmmm...
AWWW--HMMMmmm...
BAM!
WELL, WELL, WELL! AS I LIVE AND BREATHE, KNUCKLES--
AWWW-HMMMmmm...
--YOU NEVER CEASE TO AMAZE!
I REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST WAS TEACHING YOU THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION--*
--AND I WONDERED IF ANYTHING I SAID REALLY SUNK IN!
UPON FURTHER REVIEW, I CAN EMPHATICALLY STATE--
*BACK IN KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL. I -- EDITOR

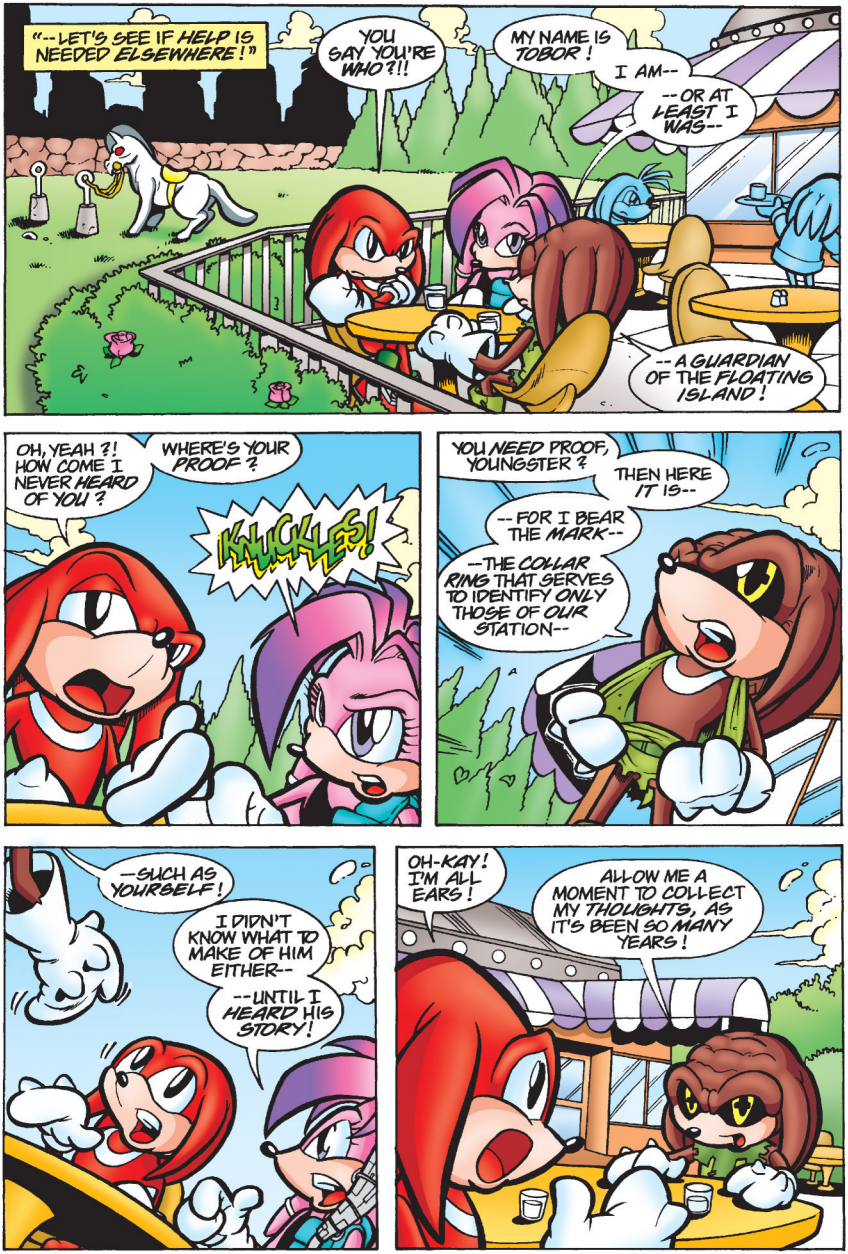

--THIS ISN'T WHAT I WOULD CALL A TEXTBOOK EXAMPLE OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT!
Y'KNOW, ARCHY, I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN'T MISS YOU--
--BUT I'M AFRAID A LOT'S GONE DOWN SINCE I LAST SAW YOU!
IT JUST ISN'T THE SAME ANYMORE!
THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT, MY BOY!
THE FACT THAT IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME--
LATER, ARCHY!
LATER?
YEAH--

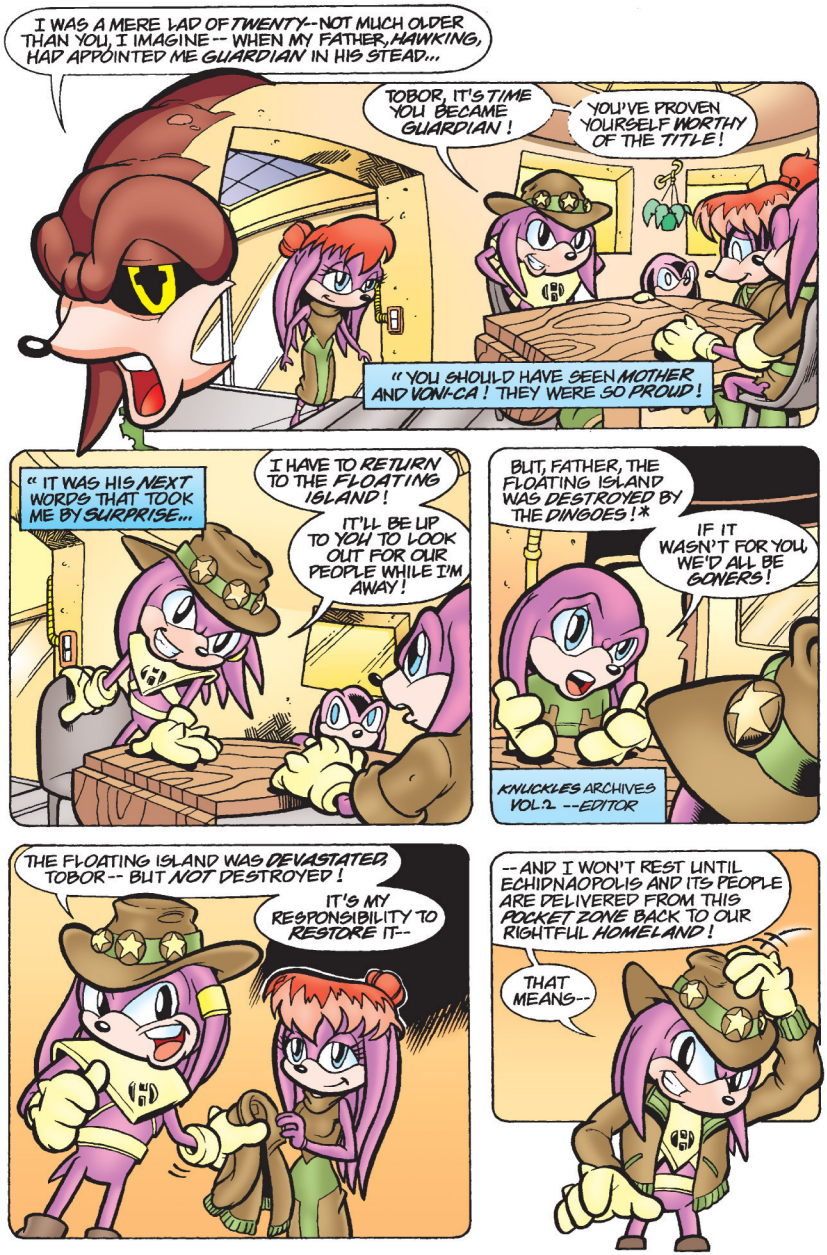

MR.


IT WORKED!
I COULD "SEE" MY FLIGHT PATH BEFORE ME--AIDED BY THE GUIDING STAR GEM YANAR GAVE ME!*
*KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL. 3 --EDITOR
THIS STONE WOULD EXPLAIN HOW I WAS ABLE TO KNOW MY WAY HOME FROM THE BADLANDS!*
HOW'S OUR BOY, LOCKE?
*CHECK OUT KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL. 3 FOR ALL THE DETAILS -- EDITOR
IN A VERY CURIOUS MOOD, GRANDFATHER SOJOURNER!
HE'S EXAMINING THE GUIDING STAR GEM--
--AND APPARENTLY HE'S ON THE VERGE OF UNLOCKING ITS SECRETS!
WHO'S THAT APPROACHING KNUCKLES?

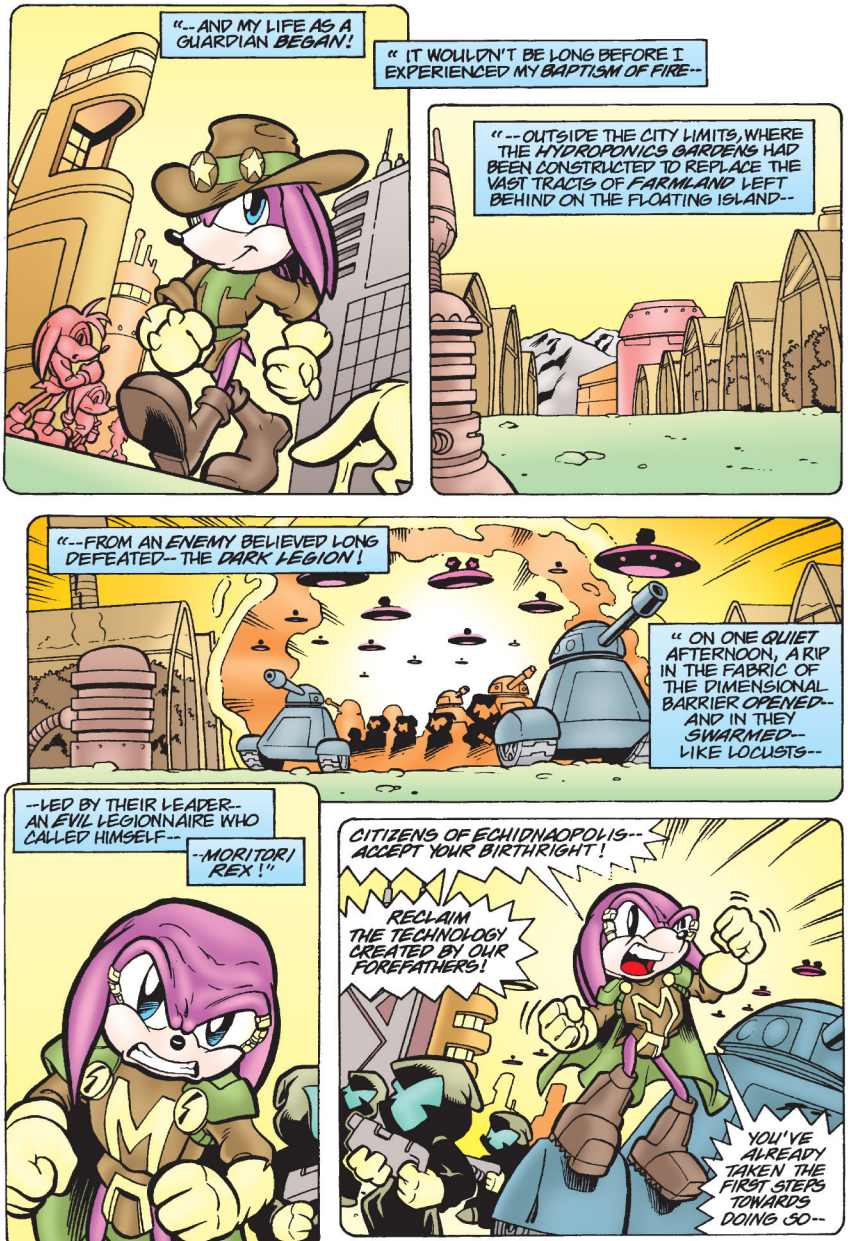

OH, IT'S KNUCKLES' FRIEND, JULIE-SU, AND SHE APPEARS TO HAVE SOMEONE WITH HER--
THE PICTURE!! IT'S GONE!!!
WHAT'S HAPPENED?!!!
BLIP!
THE POWER IS OUT!!
A CIRCUIT MUST HAVE SHORTED OUT AT THE GENERATORS!
QUICK! SOJOURNER-- TOBOR-- TO THE MED-LABS!
MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE EMERGENCY POWER HAS KICKED IN THERE--
"-- WHILE LOCKE AND I SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS IN THE POWER CORE!"
LET'S CHECK GRANDFATHER HAWKING!
SO FAR, LOOKS LIKE THE SYSTEM KICKED ON AS EXPECTED!
ALL READINGS ARE STILL NOMINAL!
WHAT ABOUT OUR OTHER PATIENT?

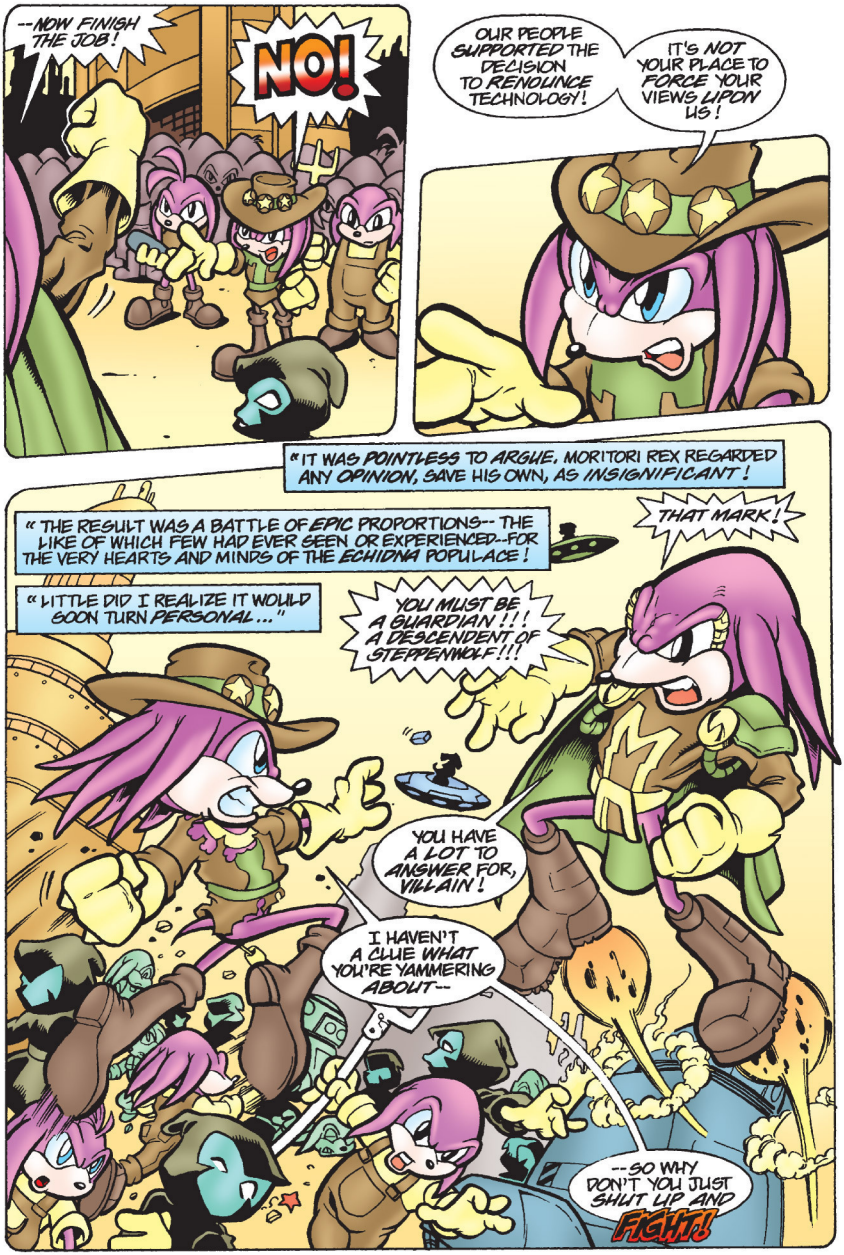

OH, THE ONE IN THE CRYOGENIC CHAMBER!
I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT HER!
I'M SURPRISED AT YOU, GRANDFATHER TOBOR!
HOW COULD YOU FORGET--
--OUR HONORED GUEST AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?
ESPECIALLY WITH THE BOY WANDERING--
I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN!
I JUST NEVER BELIEVED IN ALIGNING OURSELVES WITH AN OUTSIDER'S CAUSE!
YOU WON'T HEAR ANY ARGUMENTS FROM ME, TOBOR!
HOWEVER--
--WE'RE NOT THE FINAL AUTHORITIES AROUND HERE!
THE BROTHERHOOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN GUIDED BY THE GROUP CONSENSUS!
CAN'T FAULT WHAT WORKS, EH?
EXACTLY!
C'MON--

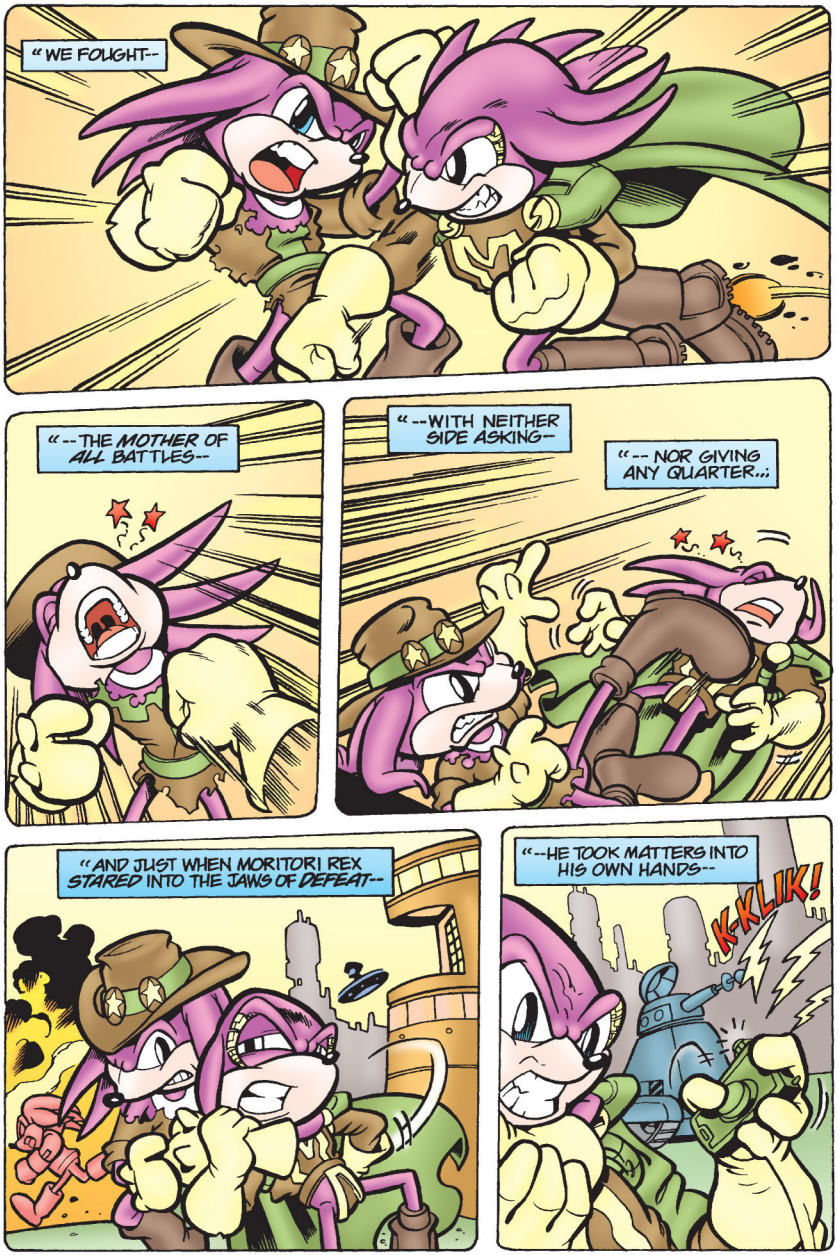

"--LET'S SEE IF HELP IS NEEDED ELSEWHERE!"
YOU SAY YOU'RE WHO?!!
MY NAME IS TOBOR!
I AM--
--OR AT LEAST I WAS--
--A GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND!
OH, YEAH?! HOW COME I NEVER HEARD OF YOU?
WHERE'S YOUR PROOF?
KNUCKLES!
YOU NEED PROOF, YOUNGSTER?
THEN HERE IT IS--
--FOR I BEAR THE MARK--
--THE COLLAR RING THAT SERVES TO IDENTIFY ONLY THOSE OF OUR STATION--
--SUCH AS YOURSELF!
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF HIM EITHER--
--UNTIL I HEARD HIS STORY!
OH-KAY! I'M ALL EARS!
ALLOW ME A MOMENT TO COLLECT MY THOUGHTS, AS IT'S BEEN SO MANY YEARS!

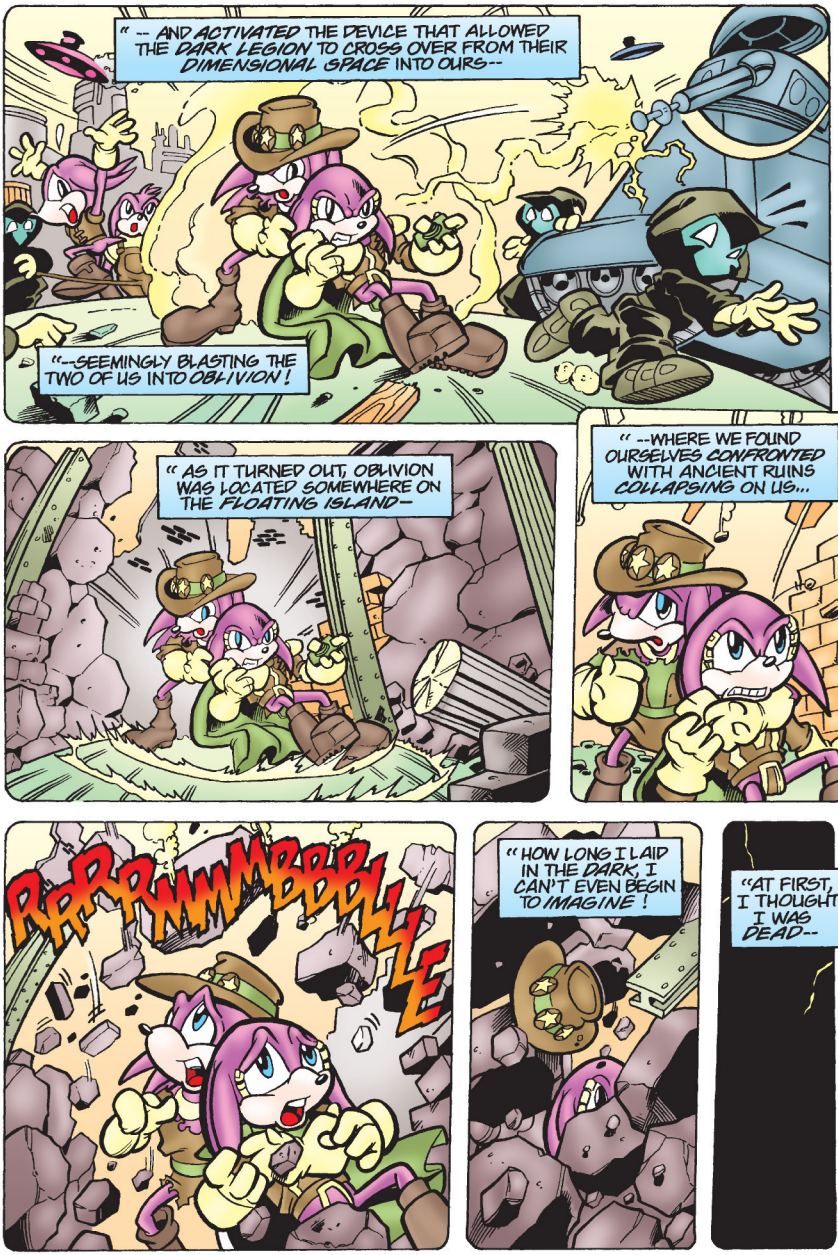

I WAS A MERE LAD OF TWENTY--NOT MUCH OLDER THAN YOU, I IMAGINE -- WHEN MY FATHER, HAWKING, HAD APPOINTED ME GUARDIAN IN HIS STEAD...
TOBOR, IT'S TIME YOU BECAME GUARDIAN!
YOU'VE PROVEN YOURSELF WORTHY OF THE TITLE!
"YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN MOTHER AND VONI-CA! THEY WERE SO PROUD!
"IT WAS HIS NEXT WORDS THAT TOOK ME BY SURPRISE...
I HAVE TO RETURN TO THE FLOATING ISLAND!
IT'LL BE UP TO YOU TO LOOK OUT FOR OUR PEOPLE WHILE I'M AWAY!
BUT, FATHER, THE FLOATING ISLAND WAS DESTROYED BY THE DINGOES!*
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU, WE'D ALL BE GONERS!
KNUCKLES ARCHIVES VOL.2 --EDITOR
THE FLOATING ISLAND WAS DEVASTATED, TOBOR -- BUT NOT DESTROYED!
IT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY TO RESTORE IT--
--AND I WON'T REST UNTIL ECHIDNAOPOLIS AND ITS PEOPLE ARE DELIVERED FROM THIS POCKET ZONE BACK TO OUR RIGHTFUL HOMELAND!
THAT MEANS--

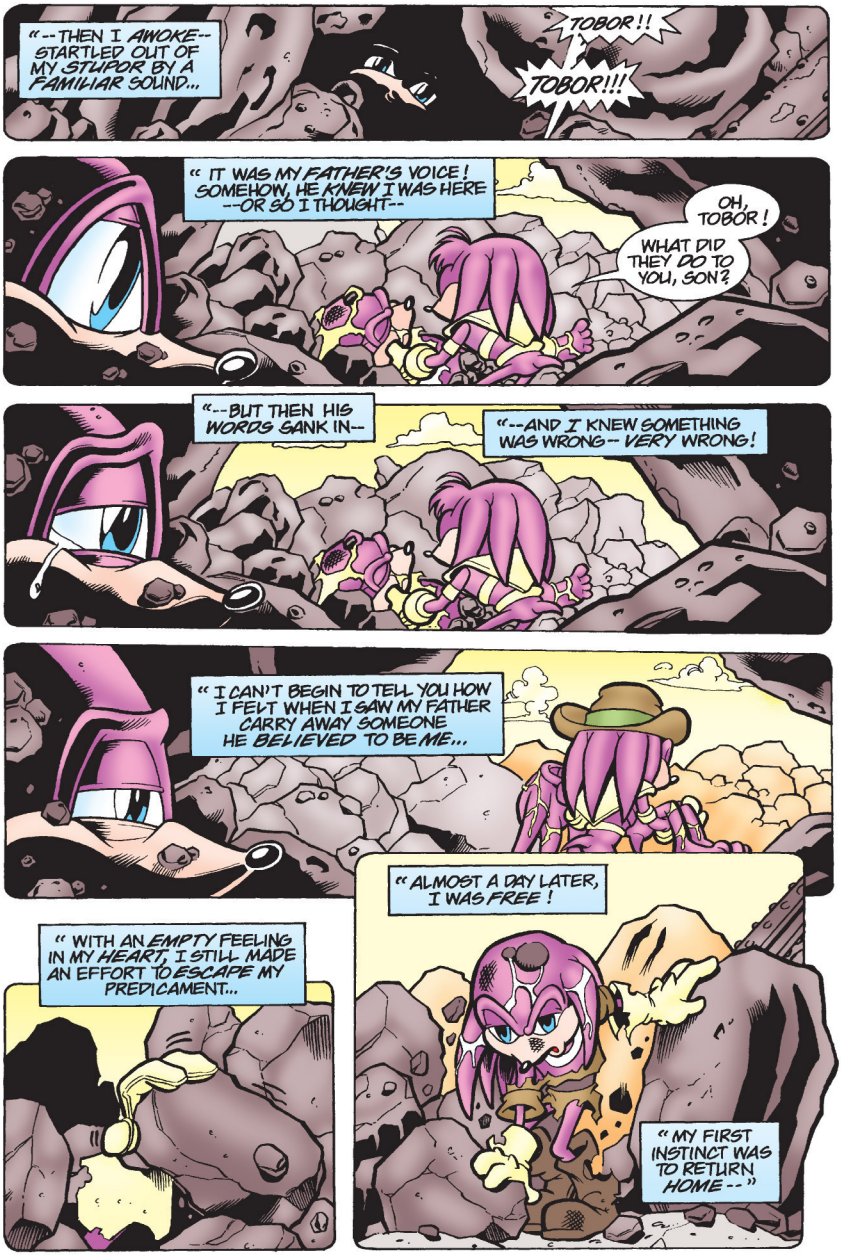
--YOU'RE NOW THE MAN OF THE HOUSE!
WEAR IT PROUDLY, SON!
I'M COMING BACK TO YOU, SONJA-RA--
--NO MATTER WHAT!
YOU DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO, DEAR! THE KIDS AND I WILL BE FINE!
BAM!
JUST MAKE SURE YOU DO COME BACK TO ME!
« AFTER ONE LAST KISS, FATHER DEPARTED TO BEGIN HIS TASK...

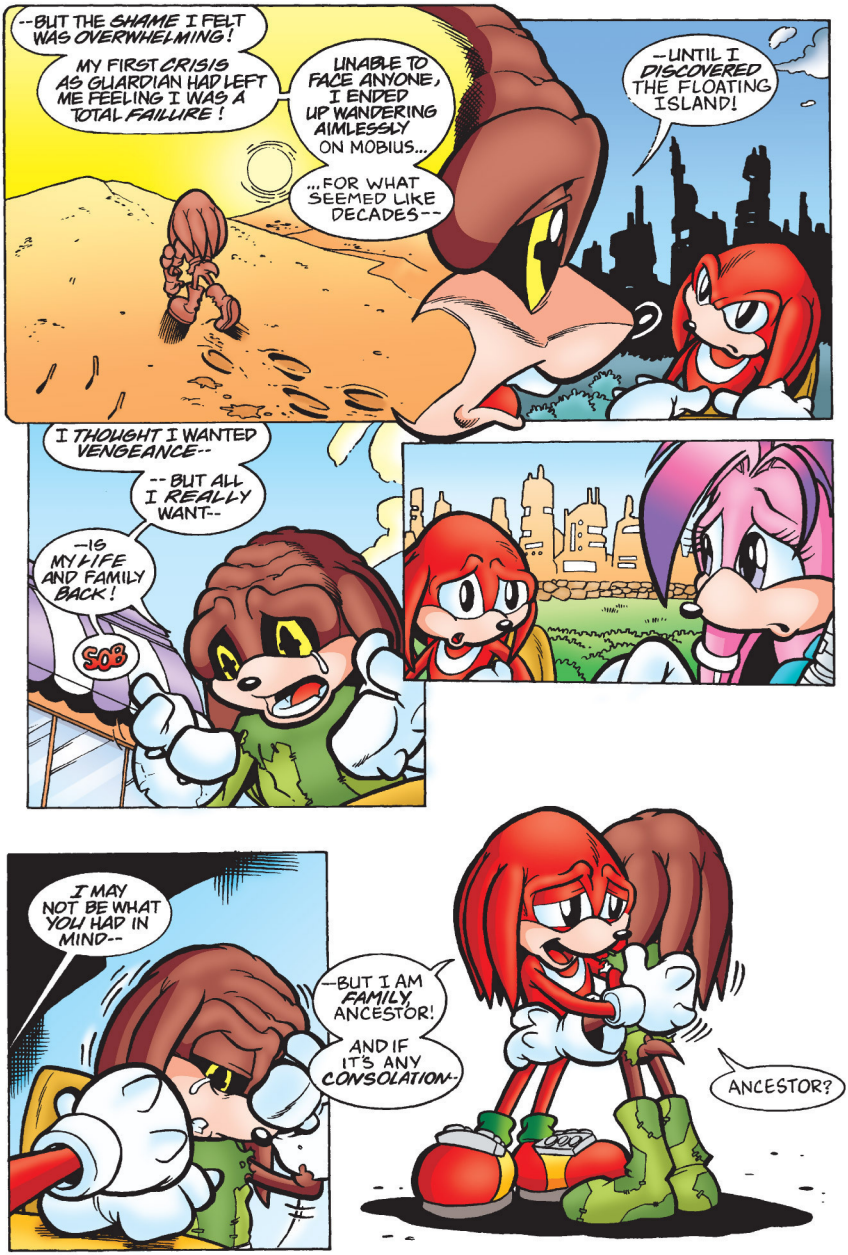

"--AND MY LIFE AS A GUARDIAN BEGAN!
" IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE I EXPERIENCED MY BAPTISM OF FIRE--
"--OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS, WHERE THE HYDROPONICS GARDENS HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED TO REPLACE THE VAST TRACTS OF FARMLAND LEFT BEHIND ON THE FLOATING ISLAND--
"--FROM AN ENEMY BELIEVED LONG DEFEATED-- THE DARK LEGION!
" ON ONE QUIET AFTERNOON, A RIP IN THE FABRIC OF THE DIMENSIONAL BARRIER OPENED-- AND IN THEY SWARMED-- LIKE LOCUSTS--
--LED BY THEIR LEADER-- AN EVIL LEGIONNAIRE WHO CALLED HIMSELF--
--MORITORI REX!"
CITIZENS OF ECHIDNAOPOLIS-- ACCEPT YOUR BIRTHRIGHT!
RECLAIM THE TECHNOLOGY CREATED BY OUR FOREFATHERS!
YOU'VE ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS DOING SO--

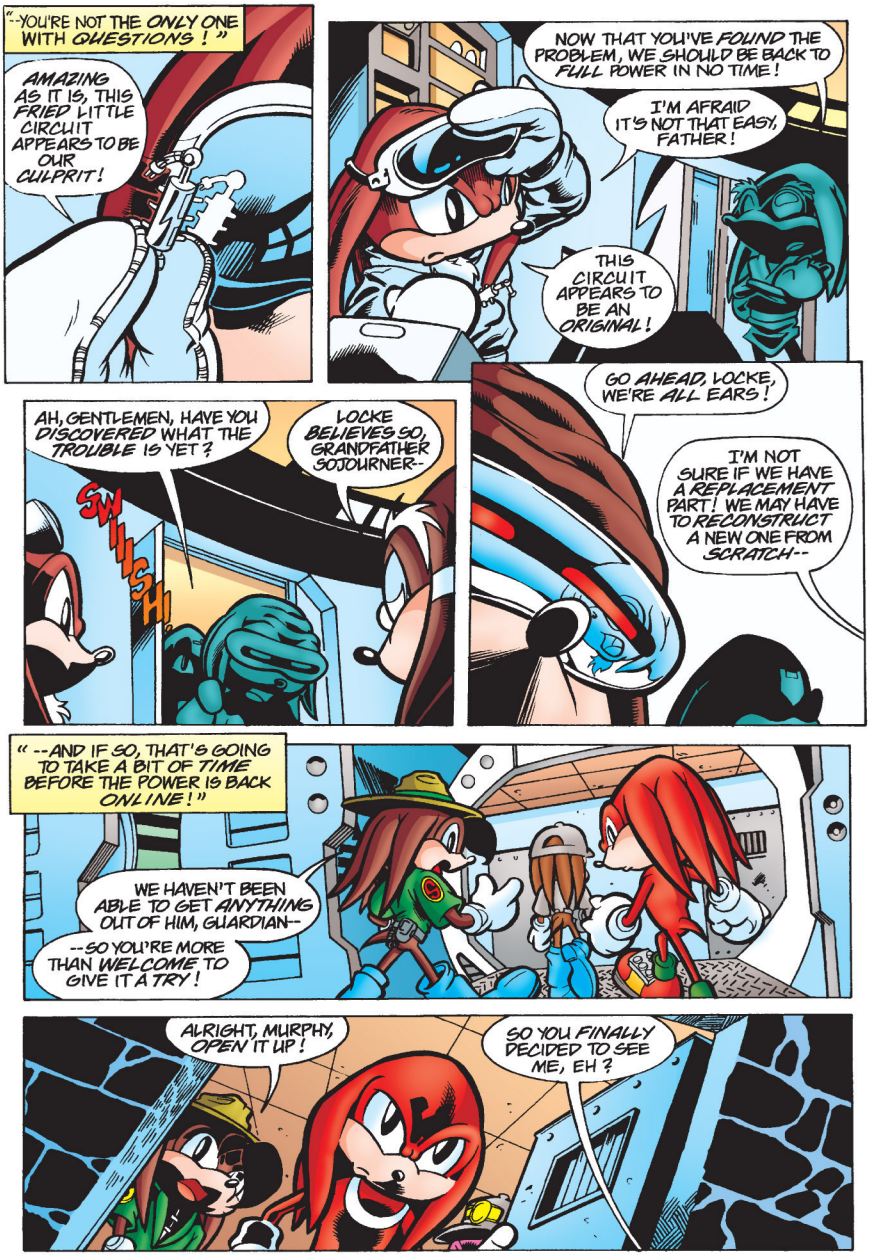

--NOW FINISH THE JOB!
NO!
OUR PEOPLE SUPPORTED THE DECISION TO RENOUNCE TECHNOLOGY!
IT'S NOT YOUR PLACE TO FORCE YOUR VIEWS UPON US!
"IT WAS POINTLESS TO ARGUE, MORITORI REX REGARDED ANY OPINION, SAVE HIS OWN, AS INSIGNIFICANT!
"THE RESULT WAS A BATTLE OF EPIC PROPORTIONS-- THE LIKE OF WHICH FEW HAD EVER SEEN OR EXPERIENCED--FOR THE VERY HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE ECHIDNA POPULACE!
"LITTLE DID I REALIZE IT WOULD SOON TURN PERSONAL..."
THAT MARK!
YOU MUST BE A GUARDIAN!!! A DESCENDENT OF STEPPENWOLF!!!
YOU HAVE A LOT TO ANSWER FOR, VILLAIN!
I HAVEN'T A CLUE WHAT YOU'RE YAMMERING ABOUT--
--SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST SHUT UP AND FIGHT!

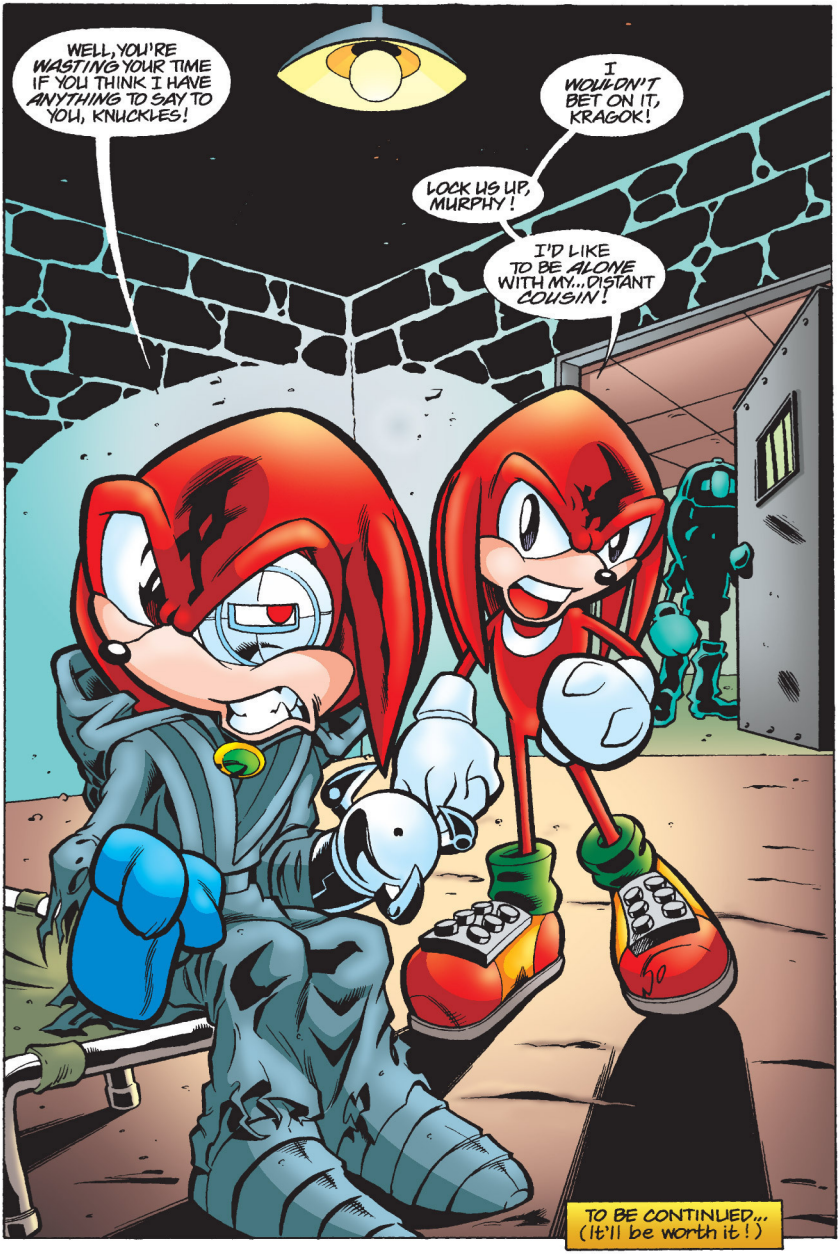

"WE FOUGHT--
"--THE MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES--
"--WITH NEITHER SIDE ASKING--
"-- NOR GIVING ANY QUARTER...
"AND JUST WHEN MORITORI REX STARED INTO THE JAWS OF DEFEAT--
"--HE TOOK MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS--
K-KLIK!


" -- AND ACTIVATED THE DEVICE THAT ALLOWED THE DARK LEGION TO CROSS OVER FROM THEIR DIMENSIONAL SPACE INTO OURS--
"--SEEMINGLY BLASTING THE TWO OF US INTO OBLIVION!
" AS IT TURNED OUT, OBLIVION WAS LOCATED SOMEWHERE ON THE FLOATING ISLAND--
" --WHERE WE FOUND OURSELVES CONFRONTED WITH ANCIENT RUINS COLLAPSING ON US...
RRRRWMMBBBLLLE
" HOW LONG I LAID IN THE DARK, I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE!
"AT FIRST, I THOUGHT I WAS DEAD--


"--THEN I AWOKE-- STARTLED OUT OF MY STUPOR BY A FAMILIAR SOUND...
TOBOR!!
TOBOR!!!
" IT WAS MY FATHER'S VOICE! SOMEHOW, HE KNEW I WAS HERE --OR SO I THOUGHT--
OH, TOBOR! WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU, SON?
"--BUT THEN HIS WORDS SANK IN--
"--AND I KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG-- VERY WRONG!
" I CAN'T BEGIN TO TELL YOU HOW I FELT WHEN I SAW MY FATHER CARRY AWAY SOMEONE HE BELIEVED TO BE ME...
" WITH AN EMPTY FEELING IN MY HEART, I STILL MADE AN EFFORT TO ESCAPE MY PREDICAMENT...
" ALMOST A DAY LATER, I WAS FREE!
" MY FIRST INSTINCT WAS TO RETURN HOME--"


--BUT THE SHAME I FELT WAS OVERWHELMING!
MY FIRST CRISIS AS GUARDIAN HAD LEFT ME FEELING I WAS A TOTAL FAILURE!
UNABLE TO FACE ANYONE, I ENDED UP WANDERING AIMLESSLY ON MOBIUS...
...FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE DECADES--
--UNTIL I DISCOVERED THE FLOATING ISLAND!
I THOUGHT I WANTED VENGEANCE--
-- BUT ALL I REALLY WANT--
--IS MY LIFE AND FAMILY BACK!
SOB
I MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU HAD IN MIND--
--BUT I AM FAMILY, ANCESTOR!
AND IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION--
ANCESTOR?


"--YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH QUESTIONS!"
AMAZING AS IT IS, THIS FRIED LITTLE CIRCUIT APPEARS TO BE OUR CULPRIT!
NOW THAT YOU'VE FOUND THE PROBLEM, WE SHOULD BE BACK TO FULL POWER IN NO TIME!
I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT THAT EASY, FATHER!
THIS CIRCUIT APPEARS TO BE AN ORIGINAL!
GO AHEAD, LOCKE, WE'RE ALL EARS!
I'M NOT SURE IF WE HAVE A REPLACEMENT PART! WE MAY HAVE TO RECONSTRUCT A NEW ONE FROM SCRATCH--
AH, GENTLEMEN, HAVE YOU DISCOVERED WHAT THE TROUBLE IS YET?
LOCKE BELIEVES SO, GRANDFATHER SOJOURNER--
SWIIISH!
"--AND IF SO, THAT'S GOING TO TAKE A BIT OF TIME BEFORE THE POWER IS BACK ONLINE!"
WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET ANYTHING OUT OF HIM, GUARDIAN--
--SO YOU'RE MORE THAN WELCOME TO GIVE IT A TRY!
ALRIGHT, MURPHY, OPEN IT UP!
SO YOU FINALLY DECIDED TO SEE ME, EH?


WELL, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME IF YOU THINK I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO YOU, KNUCKLES!
I WOULDN'T BET ON IT, KRAGOK!
LOCK US UP, MURPHY!
I'D LIKE TO BE ALONE WITH MY...DISTANT COUSIN!
TO BE CONTINUED... (It'll be worth it!)